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Washington's Unemployment Rose Slightly in February

OLYMPIA – Washington's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate rose one-tenth of a percentage point to 6.8 percent in February, Employment Security Commissioner Sylvia P. Mundy announced today. The nation's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate also increased by one-tenth of a percentage point to 5.8 percent.

Washington's non-adjusted unemployment rate held constant at 7.5 percent.

"The labor market has changed little over the month of February," said Mundy. "Furthermore, there has been virtually no change in the jobless rate since it hovered around seven percent a year ago. The Washington labor market seems to be continuing a holding pattern began in early 2002."

Washington's non-adjusted, nonagricultural wage and salary employment grew by 2,300 in February, an increase of less than 0.1 percent. This small increase is another indication of the *sideways* movement in the labor market, with little significant change in the overall employment and unemployment numbers. Over-the-month growth occurred in wholesale trade (+300), information (+800), financial activities (+200), professional and business services (+2,000), education and health services (+2,700), leisure and hospitality (+800), and government (+4,200). None of the increases were especially large or unusual for this time of year. Some were due to accounting related firms as businesses prepare their income taxes, while others were due to increases in security services. There were normal up-ticks in both private and public education as winter breaks ended and an additional increase in local government due to poll workers needed for local elections.

Over-the-month declines occurred in construction (-200), manufacturing (-2,100), retail trade (-5,900), and transportation, warehousing, and utilities (-600). The losses in manufacturing occurred principally in aerospace products and parts manufacturing (-1,900). Declines in retail trade occurred in general merchandise and clothing and clothing accessory stores. The weak retail trade sector, which was mirrored on the national level, was partly a reflection of consumer jitters as war with Iraq neared and was accompanied by a sharp drop in consumer confidence in February.

Washington's year-over-year change in nonagricultural employment was up 11,800 from February 2002. This increase occurred despite a loss of 19,500 jobs in manufacturing. Over half of the decline in manufacturing was in aerospace products and parts manufacturing. Other sectors down from last year include retail trade (-800), transportation, warehousing, and utilities (-1,000), and information (-600). Advancing sectors were financial activities (+3,400), professional and business services (+3,800), education and health services (+8,000), leisure and hospitality (+3,700), and government (+10,700). Specific gainers over the year were credit and related activities, which include mortgage and loan brokerage and check cashing services (+2,300), employment services (+2,800), and most sectors of education and health services. The increase in government was due almost entirely to federal (+2,100) and to local (+8,300) government.

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In an effort to accelerate Washington's economic recovery, more than 50 WorkSource centers statewide are providing employers with recruiting, hiring and placement services at no cost.

Services to businesses include:

- **Qualified workers.** WorkSource maintains the state's largest database of job seekers and their qualifications.
- **Advice and help from experts.** Business representatives who specialize in the local labor market can work directly with employers to find and pre-screen job applicants. They also can help find new jobs for workers affected by downsizing.
- **Free job listings.** Employers can easily post an opening or search for qualified candidates online at <http://www.go2worksource.biz>.
- **Information.** Experts can help employers understand regulations and explain how to take advantage of tax credits. They can provide occupational wage information and other current labor market data, by industry and county.
- **Training.** WorkSource can provide skills training for employees.
- **Resources.** Small business planning and financing resources are available.

Employers interested in obtaining additional information about special business services available through WorkSource are urged to contact a local WorkSource center or check out WorkSource services online at <http://go2worksource.com>.

News Media: Charts and a map showing county unemployment rates are available in the “News & Publications” section of Employment Security’s Web site at <http://www.wa.gov/esd/AgencyInfo/news.html>.

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